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ABSTRACT

The Center for Teaching and Learning at Ball State University is described in this report. Designed to make continuing efforts to improve the teaching and learning process, it offers many unique programs aimed at disseminating knowledge on the subject and encouraging faculty to use the results of these activities to improve their teaching. Some of the special programs are: periodic presentations on topics of general interest (e.g. testing and evaluation, course planning and objectives, and the art of lecturing); a newsletter distributed every term to faculty and staff with information on past and future teaching and learning improvement activities and materials; the Teaching Improvement Process program (which uses trained faculty teaching consultants to work with other faculty members); consultation on teaching and learning issues on an informal basis; and a series of "Friday at Noon" discussion groups on teaching and learning issues. The Center is also a central source of assistance, resources, and encouragement for efforts to improve teaching and learning across the campus. It is estimated that about 10,000 faculty, students, and administrators are impacted by this project each academic year. (SM)

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- o To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- o To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- o To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- o To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

Abstract

The Center for Teaching and Learning is an innovative part of Ball State University's continuing efforts to improve the teaching and learning process. Since good teaching is at the heart of a successful institution, the purpose of the Center has been successfully achieved by a myriad of unique programs aimed at disseminating knowledge about the teaching-learning process, and encouraging faculty to use the results of these activities to improve their teaching. Nearly 10,000 people effectively impacted by the Center's activities during each academic year.

A CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

There is no more important task for a University than to aggressively seek ways to improve the teaching and learning process.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is Ball State University's innovative response to this charge. The Center evolved out of the University's historically strong commitment to academic improvement, innovation, and educational excellence.

Background

The purpose of the Center is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This is accomplished by disseminating knowledge about effective teaching and learning, conducting research and generating new information about the teaching-learning process, and encouraging faculty to use the results of these activities to improve their teaching.

Description of the Program

A myriad of programs designed to meet these goals are available under the auspices of the Center. The Director of CTL is responsible for administering the various programs. The Center for Teaching and Learning Series on University Teaching provides periodic presentations on topics of general interest such as "Course Planning and Objectives," "Testing and Evaluation," and "The Art of Lecturing" to anyone interested in improving teaching. In addition, a self-instructional module enabling the instructor

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to apply the generic instructions from the presentation to their specific course is available. Attendance at the presentations has been high and requests for the self-instructional modules from across campus have necessitated multiple printings.

A CTL Newsletter is distributed to 1400 faculty and professional staff across campus every term. Its purpose is to provide information about past and future teaching/learning improvement activities and materials. Also "Idea Papers" are mailed on an occasional basis. They focus on one particular topic of general interest and provide a brief summary of the existing literature, a strong section on how to apply these ideas, and then references for further reading. Sample titles include "Improving Lectures" and "101 Suggestions for the First Two Weeks of the Term".

Perhaps one of the most successful programs with long-term implications for teaching/learning improvement is the Teaching Improvement Process (TIP). The TIP program was adapted from the model developed at the University of Massachusetts in the 1970s. TIP involves the use of trained faculty teaching consultants who work with other faculty members who volunteer for the teaching improvement process. Each term, the trained consultants work with two faculty clients. The three main stages of TIP include data-

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gathering (interviews, videotaping, student evaluations, etc.), analyzing data and implementing strategies for teaching improvement, and then the data re-collection process to determine the effectiveness of these strategies.

Both the consultants and clients have been universally positive about participating in TIP. TIP has been likened to the process of dropping a pebble in a pond. Just as the ripples widen in a pond, so do the effects of teaching improvement widen with each future class the client teaches and as they share what they have learned with their colleagues.

CTL also serves as a central source of assistance, resources, and encouragement for efforts to improve teaching and learning across campus. The Resource Center of books, monographs, articles, and videotapes which are as current as possible and focus on teaching improvement is available for convenient access. Funds also have been made available through CTL for faculty members to conduct empirical research on teaching and learning issues to increase the bounds of knowledge. This has resulted in several papers being presented at national meetings and published in referred outlets.

CTL's Director is available for individual or group consultation on teaching/learning issues on an informal basis. Many phone conversations and appointments occur every week. The Director also makes a large number of presentations on various teaching and

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learning topics to different groups both on and off campus. For example, a presentation entitled "What Research Says About Improving Teaching and Learning at Ball State University" was made to a meeting department heads from the College of Sciences and Humanities, and the audience at the Fall Orientation Meeting for Teaching Fellows heard "Ready or Not--Here Come the Students". An appropriate speaker for almost any topic or group can be arranged through CTL.

A series of "Friday at Noon" discussion groups sponsored by CTL on teaching and learning issues has been quite popular. A topic such as "Teaching Large Sections" is designated for each session and the format is open discussion. This has been an excellent way to build a cadre of faculty committed to excellence in teaching and to encourage faculty-helping-faculty in sharing ideas that work.

Another useful function that CTL serves is to function as a link between Ball State and related programs, specialists, and materials at other institutions. By networking at national meetings and visiting other centers, Ball State has been able to share successful ideas with other universities and has been able to avoid reinventing the wheel. The Director attends many state and national meetings every year and presents papers in which projects and ideas are mutually shared with faculty development personnel from other institutions.

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CTL also was instrumental in Ball State's selection as a collaborating institution for the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (NCRIPAL) project funded by the federal Office for Educational Research and Improvement through the University of Michigan. As part of this project, faculty from seven departments, as well as students from their previous courses, were interviewed.

The purpose of the interviews was to develop a better understanding of the decisions faculty members make in developing courses, as well as how students perceive the faculty member's objectives based on having experienced the course design. The ultimate NCRIPAL goal is to optimize course planning efforts, but the more immediate effect on the Ball State campus was to heighten both faculty and student awareness of educational goals.

The CTL Director serves on many major University committees ranging from "The Freshmen Experience Committee" to the "Evaluation and Reward of Teaching Committee". CTL representation on committees from many areas of the University serves the important purpose of keeping teaching and learning improvement issues in the forefront of deliberations across campus.

An Advisory Board for CTL was appointed with a representative from each college. Besides serving as a very useful source of ideas and counsel on CTL issues, the board members also provide a closely bonded, cross-disciplinary support group for teaching improvement activities across campus.

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Results

It is conservatively estimated that the various programs, materials, and activities of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Ball State University impact nearly 10,000 faculty, students, and administrators during each academic year. By supporting the various teaching improvement activities of CTL, Ball State is effectively improving the educational experience for our students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ball State's CTL preceded the recent Carnegie Report (College: The Undergraduate Experience, Harper & Row, 1987). However, CTL is dedicated to meeting the Carnegie Report's recommendation that, "Good faculty are essential to a good college. Members of the faculty determine the quality of the undergraduate experience. And the investment in teaching is a key ingredient in the building of a successful institution" (p. 290). Through the kinds of activities described above, CTL has been very successful in gaining recognition across campus among administrators, faculty, and students for the importance of teaching within both the institution's mission and its goal of scholarship. It is conservatively estimated that CTL activities have effectively impact nearly 10,000 people during each academic year.

As a result of CTL's activities, there is a growing awareness on campus of the extensive research on teaching available and how such

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research can be applied to individual disciplines and courses. The appeal of effective teaching has touched and continues to touch a deeply held sense of professionalism among Ball State faculty. By drawing together an innovative group of activities dedicated to educational improvement, excellence, and innovation under the umbrella of CTL, Ball State University has been exceptionally successful in promoting the kind of good teaching so essential to the quality undergraduate experience.